Hsiao, usually translated as "filial piety," is exalted by Confucianism as one of the cardinal virtues. While it includes much more than the family, loyalty to one's parents is part of its essence. Older brothers have obligations to younger brothers, and younger brothers owe deference to older brothers. That official Confucian tract of the Ch'ing dynasty, the so-called *Sacred Edict,* was true to tradition when it made family duties primary and urged as a motive toward self-control and a righteous life not allegiance to God but to one's parents.

In such a society, the institution of marriage has been of surpassing importance. Sons are so indispensable in carrying on the family line and in maintaining the honors to ancestors that failure to have them has been regarded as a major offence against filial piety. Without sons the rites to parents cannot be continued and not only will the living be disgraced, but the spirits of the dead, deprived of such service, will be in misery. Marriage has, accordingly, been practically universal except for a few of the very poor and such special groups as Buddhist monks and nuns and Taoist ascetics. Even some of these have been married before entering the religious life. Judged by modern Western standards, moreover, marriage has taken place early. In one village in South China where customs have probably not changed greatly, a few years ago the average age for boys at marriage was seventeen and a half years and for girls about eighteen years. In a town in the North at about the same time the average age was twenty, and was less for girls than for boys. Here again the social pressure for male progeny has made itself felt, for as soon as possible sons must beget sons if family honor is to be maintained and parents

be assured of a continuation of the line and of proper honor to themselves after death.

Since marriage has been so largely for the purpose of perpetuating the family and the ancestral rites, the mating of couples has been regarded as a concern of the elders and of the family even more than of the two most immediately involved. Betrothals have been arranged by the head or other members of the family, perhaps the eldest brother, and not infrequently as a result of consultation among the more influential relatives. Generally the prospective bride and groom have had no voice whatever in the arrangement and have not even seen each other until the wed-